



Yale University  
School of Medicine



## FIELD REPORT

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In early March 2017 I, to my own surprise, was chosen out of a pool of qualified candidates to join Dr. Richard Flavell's team of brilliant minds in science at the Yale School of Medicine for one year to pursue my master thesis project. Thanks to the willing support of my professors at my home university, my prospective supervisor at Yale and most certainly the Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation, I, after months of preparation, entered the plane in August 2017 heading towards Newark, New Jersey not entirely sure what to expect.

Following an initially chaotic arrival at Newark, partially intimidated by the rigorous security controls awaiting me at the airport, I, using the slightly overpriced Amtrak train line, finally reached New Haven, Connecticut, primarily known for the prestigious Ivy League University constituting half of downtown there: Yale. Eager to help me swiftly integrate myself into the Flavellian lab community, my supervisor immediately took me with him to West Campus, a huge academic area outside of the city, where, in one of numerous conference centers, the people from the lab held their annual lab retreat. This not only gave me a chance to learn about their individual research projects during insightful presentations and follow-up discussions, but also introduced me to them within a fairly friendly and welcoming atmosphere. Although overwhelmingly impressed, yet slightly browbeaten by the level of knowledge and scientific ability present in this lab, the frantic logon procedure, i.e. getting my Yale ID and account, attending the introductory session at the Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS) and taking online courses to be eligible to work in a laboratory environment, kept me from losing my faith.

Particularly in the beginning, people in my surroundings were incredibly helpful, ranging from locals willingly guiding me towards supermarkets, the bank or campus facilities to Miss Caroline Lieber, the secretary of the Flavell Lab helping me through the administrative process, to the OISS staff, creating such a fun and welcoming session for us internationals, where we would get an overview of the city and university, details on safeguard measures, the American culture and most importantly contact details in case of questions. People from the OISS in any way exhibited great endeavor to facilitate one's inclusion in the organization and community by regularly inviting to come-togethers within the frame of expeditions, fun activities or celebrations.

Security-wise Yale has outdone itself. Although, luckily, I personally never experienced any trouble, New Haven is considered a rather dangerous city. The university, however, has developed numerous ways to tackle this problem, offering free student taxi service, so-called Safe Rides during nocturnal hours apart from the regular shuttle operations, SOS-telephones within campus area and police patrol where necessary.

Moreover, as part of the Yale community you also automatically get access to its many museums and libraries, including the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library or Yale Art Gallery, and recreational facilities, like the Whitney Payne Gymnasium. During my free time, I enjoyed experiencing different genres of art in one of the many exhibitions held weekly in Yale's museums or listen to one of many concerts held by the Yale Symphony Orchestra. I for myself especially liked the insightful details and background information you receive when attending the weekly held Yale Campus Tour, led by Yale students, which greatly helps in getting an overview of the whole campus. Besides, the Yale areal in its Gothic style is ideal to

just stroll along on a quiet weekend, taking a break in one out of various little coffeeshops, pastries or bookshops awaiting you at every corner.

On an academic level, Yale has by far excelled my expectations. In addition to almost daily high-quality seminars by world-leading scientists, the scientific community is very eager to regularly launch retreats and symposia, bringing together people from different research niches to present their work alongside top-class speakers from outside. I am incredibly thankful that I was provided the freedom to attend those, helping me to learn about unfamiliar topics, gain alternative perspectives and get access to often unpublished new data. Apart from that, you are also eligible to participate in regularly offered courses, be it conventional lectures or bioinformatics sessions, particularly at the Yale School of Medicine, to improve your computational skills. My supervisor, besides teaching me a number of experimental techniques, helping me adjust to the lab routine, continuously motivated me to expand my knowledge through opportunities like these.

In conclusion my stay abroad at Yale was an invaluable experience. Not only did I evolve into an independent, responsible scientist, able to approach scientific questions and problems with the adequate methodological skills at hand, but also was I able to broaden my horizon culturally, simply by living and working with people from different nations and backgrounds. Specifically at Yale people assist you very much in finding your way through the whole administrative requirements and adjustment phase in the beginning. Nonetheless, I recommend informing oneself thoroughly about the place you will be living in in advance, alongside organizing visa, scholarship, financing, flight and housing affairs. One might not expect it, but these things take up a lot of time before you may even leave your country. Ideally you should already have read about scholarships and visa requirements when taking an interview as part of an application process. Also, I highly encourage you to ask your prospective supervisor directly for contact details of fellow students, who already went through the same process and for advice on transport means for your arrival and accommodation in the respective place. The United States may pose a cultural shock to people, who have never been there before, including myself. But as you gradually find your place at work, having organized housing, administrative stuff, set up a mobile phone contract and bank account, you will finally learn to appreciate the vast field of opportunities waiting ahead of you. Try to get an overview of the place, its localization and surroundings, you will be living in. In my case, for instance, New York City was merely 2 hours away by train, making it an attractive spot for multiple weekend trips. Moreover, America offers many traditions, which are simply not existent in Austria. I for example was lucky enough to join an extensive and very delicious Thanksgiving meal with my colleagues from lab. People, especially Americans, tend to be quite open-minded, so making contacts, even outside your work place, should not pose a problem.

Overall, I have to say that my year at Yale was probably the best one in my life so far. Being eligible to join a prestigious lab like that, taking on projects raising my interests and promoting my critical thinking, not only helps improve my CV, but also definitively strengthened my aim to pursue a scientific career. I have learned a lot, scientifically and culturally spoken, but I am most thankful for the people I met along my way. They helped me evolve as a researcher and person and contributed to a wonderful, successful year.

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